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FRANKLIN.



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FRANKLIN.

Franklin, BENJAMIN, the youngest son and fifteenth child of a family of seventeen children, was born in Boston, in the state of Massachusetts, on the 17th of January 1706. Equipped only with such education as he could pick up in scant two years at a primary school, he was apprenticed at twelve to his brother James to learn the trade of a printer, at which he soon became notably expert. He had been there about three years when his brother established a newspaper called the *New England Courant*, which Benjamin, after assisting in the printing, was required to deliver to the subscribers. He so effectively repaired the deficiencies of his early education during the three or four years of his apprenticeship that he ventured to try his hand as a contributor to the columns of the newspaper, and with such success that, when his brother was arrested and imprisoned for a month by the Speaker of the Assembly for a too liberal exercise of his critical faculties, the management of the paper was confided to Benjamin. The younger brother presumed perhaps too much upon

his success; and for this and other reasons, the relations of the two gradually ceased to be harmonious, and despairing of finding satisfactory employment elsewhere in Boston, Franklin sold some of his books for a little money, with the determination to try his fortune elsewhere. He finally drifted to Philadelphia, where he landed on the Market Street wharf one Sunday morning, a friendless lad of seventeen, with one dollar and one shilling only in his pocket. He was fortunate enough to find employment immediately with a printer who had very little knowledge of his business, and to whom therefore Franklin's expertness and ingenuity were not long in proving almost indispensable. Not many months elapsed before an accident secured him the acquaintance of Sir William Keith, the governor of the colony, who persuaded him to go over to England for the requisite material to establish himself in the printing business in Philadelphia, by the promise to advance what money he would need for this purpose, and also to secure to him the printing for the government. Franklin arrived in London on the 12th December 1724. Instead of the letters of credit he was authorised to expect were awaiting him there he discovered to his consternation that no one who knew Keith placed the smallest dependence upon his word, and a gentleman whose acquaintance he had made on the passage laughed at the idea of the governor giving a letter of credit, who, as he said, had no credit to give. Franklin soon sought and found employment in a London printing-house, where he remained for the next eighteen months. He then

returned to Philadelphia, where, in connection with a fellow-printer whose father advanced some capital, he established a printing-house for himself. His skill as a printer, his industry, his good sense and personal popularity ensured him prompt and signal success. In September 1729 he bought for a trifle the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, a newspaper then only three months old, and in its columns proceeded to lay the foundations of a reputation as a journalist to which he owes no inconsiderable portion of his distinction among men.

In the following year Franklin married his old love, Deborah Read, now a widow, a young woman of his own station in life, by whom he had two children, a son who died in his youth, and a daughter, Sally, who afterwards became Mrs Bache, a name since honourably associated with the history of American science. In 1732 he commenced the publication of what is still known to literature as *Poor Richard's Almanac*, which attained a circulation then unprecedented in the colonies. His contributions to it have been republished in many languages. In 1736 Franklin was appointed clerk of the Assembly, in 1737 postmaster of Philadelphia; and shortly after he was elected a member of the Assembly, to which body he was re-elected almost uninterruptedly until his first mission to England, previous to which he was promoted to the office of deputy postmaster-general for the colonies.

In 1746 he commenced those fruitful researches in electricity which gave him a position among the most illustrious natural philosophers. He exhibited in a

more distinct form than heretofore the theory of positive and negative electricity; by his famous experiment with a boy's kite he proved that lightning and electricity are identical; and he it was who suggested the protecting of buildings by lightning-conductors. His electrical discoveries secured to him at the comparatively early age of forty-seven an election to the Royal Society of London. Outside of his contributions to electrical science Franklin was the author of many other discoveries of only less importance; among them three are deserving of special mention. They are: (1) The course of storms over the North American continent—a discovery which marked an epoch in the science of meteorology, and which has since been utilised by the aid of land and ocean telegraphy. (2) The course and most important characteristics of the Gulf Stream, its high temperature, and the consequent uses of the thermometer in navigation. (3) The diverse powers of different colours to absorb solar heat.

But the researches upon which Franklin's scientific celebrity mainly depends occupied at the most only seven or eight years, and then gave way to the more immediately pressing calls of his country in other spheres, where only the true proportions of his genius were revealed. His electrical experiments, brilliant as they were, were only the embellishments of his greater career as a statesman and diplomatist. In 1757 he was sent to England to insist upon the right of the province to tax the proprietors of the land still held under the Penn charter for their share of the cost of defending it from hostile Frenchmen and

Indians. His mission was crowned with success. He was absent on this work five years, during which he received honorary degrees from Oxford and Edinburgh. In 1764 he was again sent to England to contest the pretensions of parliament to tax the American colonies without representation. The differences, however, between the mother-government and the colonies in regard to the prerogatives of the crown and the powers of parliament at last became too grave to be reconciled by negotiation. The officers sent by the home government to New England were resisted in the discharge of their duty, and in 1775 patriotism as well as regard for his personal safety decided Franklin to return to the United States, where he at once participated actively in the measures and deliberations of the colonists, which resulted in the declaration of their independence on the 4th July 1776, and in constituting what has since been known as the Republic of the United States.

To secure foreign assistance in prosecuting the war in which the colonies were already engaged with Great Britain, Franklin, now in the seventy-first year of his age, was sent to Paris. He reached the French capital in the winter of 1776-77, where his fame as a philosopher as well as a statesman had already preceded him. His great skill as a negotiator and immense personal popularity, reinforced by the then hereditary antipathy of the French and English people for each other, conspired to favour the purpose of Franklin's mission. A treaty of alliance with the United States was signed by the French king on the 6th of February 1778, while opportune

and substantial aids in arms and munitions of war as well as money were supplied from the royal arsenals and treasury. On the 3d of September 1783 his mission was crowned with success through England's recognition of the independence of the United States. Franklin continued to discharge the duties of minister-plenipotentiary in Paris until 1785, when, in consequence of his advanced age and increasing infirmities, he was relieved at his own request. He reached Philadelphia on the 14th of September 1785, when he was elected almost immediately president of the state of Pennsylvania, with but one dissenting vote besides his own. To this office he was twice re-elected unanimously. During the period of his service as president he was also chosen a delegate to the convention which framed the constitution of the United States. With the expiration of his third term as president in 1788 Franklin retired from public life, after an almost continuous service of more than forty years, with a fortune neither too large nor too small for his fame or his comfort. Franklin was the founder and first president of the Philosophical Society of Pennsylvania, and an honorary member of all leading scientific societies of the Old World.

He died on the 17th April 1790, in the eighty-fourth year of his age, and was buried in the graveyard of Christ Church, Philadelphia. His writings continue to this day to be republished in almost every written tongue, and yet curiously enough he wrote nothing for the press after the termination of his editorial career except a half-dozen or more com-

paratively brief contributions to the journals of the day, for the rectification of public opinion in Europe on American affairs.

His complete writings, which have been edited by John Bigelow (10 vols. New York, 1886-87), consist almost exclusively of letters addressed to private individuals, very few of which were given to the press in his lifetime. Even his scientific discoveries were communicated to the world in letters to personal friends. The very interesting autobiography was specially edited by Bigelow (1868). In the *Life of Franklin* by Bigelow (published by Lippincott, Philadelphia), the author says he had 'tried to condense everything Franklin left behind him that any one not pursuing special investigations now cares to read of the most eminent journalist, philosopher, diplomatist, and statesman of his time.'

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